CHARACTERIZATION IN FIVE PLAYS BY LANGSTON HUGHES

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

Introduction

This study will explore the patterns or types of characterizations that are presented among the heroes and heroines in Five Plays by Langston Hughes. It also discusses the recurrences of patterns or types of characterizations among the heroes and heroines in these plays. Plot summaries of the five plays will be used to illustrate the author's dramatic technique. The five plays included in this study are: Mulatto (1931), Little Ham (1935), Soul Gone Home (1937), Tambourines to Glory (1949), and Simply Heavenly (1953). An analysis of the characters will follow. The conclusion will include a comparative analysis of the characters involved in this study as well as an evaluation of the significance of Hughes' characterizations.

Langston Hughes, born in Joplin, Missouri in 1902, has been hailed by several authors as a prolific writer of poems, short stories, and plays that emphasize the plight of the Black man in America. Hughes stated that, "The bulk of my work stems directly from the life of the Negro

in America. The major aims of my work have been to interpret and comment upon Negro life, and its relation to the problems of democracy...."[1] Hughes, according to one source, "protested against the distorted interpretations of Negro life by white playwrights and declared that someone would write honestly about Negroes and he predicted: 'It'll be me myself!'"[2]

A survey of the literature about Hughes and his works has revealed that literary critics have examined his poetry and his stories quite extensively. However, only a very small amount of this criticism has dealt with his plays. According to one source, "Evaluation of Hughes' work is hampered by lack of critical commentary in standard sources on recent American literature. To locate commentary of any kind one must go to studies of Negro achievement written by Negro authors."[3] Another source has said that, "Hughes never became outstanding as a playwright. The reason for his failure is evident in a close examination of his works."[4] The few authors who have analyzed Hughes'

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[1]Langston Hughes, "Some Practical Observations: A Colloquy," Phylon, XI (Winter, 1950), p. 307.

[2]Doris Abramson, Negro Playwrights in the American Theatre 1925-1959 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967, p. vii.

[3]Donald C. Dickinson, "Introduction," A Bio-Bibliography of Langston Hughes 1902-1967 (Hamden, Connecticut: The Shoe String Press, Inc., 1967), pp. 1-2.

[4]Darwin Turner, "Langston Hughes as a Playwright," CLAJ, XI (June, 1968), p. 297.

plays with emphasis on his characterizations have done so in shallow or limited ways. Perhaps this void stems from the fact that Hughes' characters, especially the ones in the "folk comedies" are "uncomplex" and are "without subconscious motivation."[5]

When he was nineteen years old, Langston Hughes' career as a dramatist began with the publication of The Gold Piece which "reflects the quiet simplicity of the Mexican village life."[6] Prior to this, Hughes' interest in the theatre probably began to develop when he was a small boy. Hughes stated, "Mother used to take me to see all the [sic] plays that came to Topeka like Buster Brown, Under Two Flags, and Uncle Tom's Cabin. We were fond of plays and books. Once we heard Faust."[7]

Despite the fact that Hughes was discouraged (by several critics) as a playwright, according to James Emmanuel, "His [Hughes'] early plays are part of his almost single-handed effort, in the 1920's especially, to establish in Harlem, Chicago, Los Angeles and elsewhere an authentic Negro National theatre."[8]

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[5]Webster Smalley, "Introduction," Five Plays by Langston Hughes (Bloomington: Indiana Press, 1963), p. xii.

[6]Ibid., p. ix.

[7]Langston Hughes, The Big Sea (New York: Hill and Wang, 1940), p. 15.

[8]James Emmanuel, Theodore L. Gross, et. al., eds., Dark Symphony (New York: The Free Press, 1968), p. 191.

Hughes' first full-length play, Mulatto (1931), was "completed while he was working with the Hedgerow Theatre in Philadelphia in 1928," [it] "was derived from his poem "Cross."[9] In addition to the aforementioned play, Hughes also wrote "two agitprops" (in the nineteen-thirties):

> Scotsboro Limited (1932) dramatizing the notorious Alabama Case of 1931, and Don't You Want to Be Free? (1936); ...Little Ham (1935), a folk comedy about the roaring twenties, Soul Gone Home (1937), a naturalist fantasy about white repression of Blacks; Tambourines to Glory (1949)..., a musical set in Harlem dealing with Faustian themes of good and evil, and redemption; and lyrics for the musical version of Rice's Street Scene....[10]

Hughes also wrote Simply Heavenly, another "folk comedy" about "urban Negro life."[11] He is credited as being the writer of several one-act gospel-song plays, a Christmas cantata, a screenplay, several opera librettos, radio scripts and the lyrics for dramatic musicals.[12]

Mulatto (1931), Hughes' first full-length play unfolds in a rural setting on a plantation system in Georgia in the nineteen-thirties. This play deals with father-son conflict, a familiar conflict in the literature of the

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[9]Myron Matlaw, Modern World Drama: An Encyclopedia (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1972), p. 373.

[10]Ibid., pp. 370-371.

[11]Webster Smalley, "Introduction," Five Plays by Langston Hughes (Bloomington: Indiana Press, 1963), pp. xii-xiii.

[12]Therman B. O'Daniel, "A Selected Classified Bibliography," Langston Hughes, Black Genius: A Critical Evaluation (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1971), pp. 216-220.

Western World. For example, it can be found in Shakespeare's Hamlet. It also deals with "miscegenation, prejudice and natural rights."[13] In this play Robert, the mulatto son of Colonel Norwood, a white semi-traditionalist, who is the owner of a plantation and Cora Lewis, his Black mistress-housekeeper, rebels against the accepted standards of the South. His rebellion leads to his conflict with his white father and finally to his murdering his father and committing suicide.

According to Hughes, the idea for writing this play was derived from his poem "Cross:"[14]

> My old man's a white old man
> And my old mother's black.
> If ever I cursed my white old man
> I take my curses back.
>
> If ever I cursed my black old mother
> And wished she were in hell,
> I'm sorry for that evil wish
> And now I wish her well.
>
> My old man died in a fine big house.
> My ma died in a shack.
> I wonder where I'm gonna die,
> Being neither white nor black?[15]

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[13]Lettie Jo Cotton, "The Negro in the American Theatre," The Negro History Bulletin, XXII (1960), p. 175.

[14]Langston Hughes, The Big Sea (New York: Hill and Wang, 1940), p. 263.

[15]Ibid.

Little Ham (1935) is the first of Hughes' urban comedies. Its setting is Harlem at the time of the Negro Renaissance,....[16] This play deals mainly with the life of Hamlet Jones. However, he is surrounded by a variety of Harlemites of the lower income bracket. The main interests of these Harlemites are partying, playing the numbers and making ends meet.[17] In this play Ham always manages to get himself in and out of tight situations that nearly always involve affairs with many women simultaneously.

Soul Gone Home (1937) is a one-act "fantasy" that includes numerous implied messages regarding the plight of Black people in America as victims of circumstances in their encounter with white repression.[18] In this play Randolph Bailey (referred to as Ronnie), who is dead, returns from the spirit world to inform his mother in a very harsh or negative way that it is her fault that he died. He blames his death of tuberculosis on her negligence in the areas of proper nutrition and decent rearing. Throughout the play the mother is horrified or shocked as her son talks to her in such a scathing tone. Meanwhile she retaliates in anger by telling him that he really was not any use to her while he was alive. He was merely a burden. In the process of

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[16]Webster Smalley, "Introduction," Five Plays by Langston Hughes (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963), p. xii.

[17]Ibid.

[18]Ibid., pp. xi-xiii.

leveling their accusations both characters say that their plight is not their fault.

Tambourines to Glory (1949) is a two-act gospel and blues song-play that also unfolds in Harlem. Hughes probably got his idea for writing the novel that later became a play when he "went to... churches and heard the tambourines play and the little tinkling bells of the triangles adorn the gay shouting tunes that sent sisters dancing down aisles for joy."[19]

In the "Author's Notes" Tambourines to Glory is described as:

> A dramatization of a very old problem--that of good versus evil, God slightly plagued by the Devil, but with God, as He always intends--winning in the end.
>
> Tambourines to Glory is a fable, a folk ballad in stage form, told in broad and very simple terms--if you will, a comic strip, a cartoon--about problems which can only convincingly be reduced to a comic strip if presented very cleanly, clearly, sharply, precisely, and with humor.[20]

In this play Laura, a very self-centered worldly person, convinces Essie, a very religious, altruistic person, to begin a storefront pentecostal-type church. Meanwhile, Big-Eyed Buddy Lomax, who is depicted as the Devil, persuades Laura to do several sacrilegious things such as selling

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[19]Langston Hughes, The Big Sea (New York: Hill and Wang, 1940), p. 209.

[20]Langston Hughes, "Author's Notes," Tambourines to Glory in Five Plays, ed. Webster Smalley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963), p. 184.

tap water for holy water to make money, using the numbers of hymns to give out numbers, and using the collection to buy a Cadillac. He also lures her into thinking that he loves her, but he continues to be attracted to other women. However, Laura, disregarding Essie's advice to get Buddy out of her life, falls overwhelmingly in love with Buddy. Finally, the tide changes when Laura stabs Buddy to death because he first slaps her and then tries to force her to kiss him. Initially, Essie, rather than Laura, is jailed because Laura stabbed Buddy with Essie's knife. However, Laura confesses, is jailed and is released on bond. Meanwhile, Laura visits the temple and the congregation accepts her. Both blues and gospel songs are sung throughout the play.

Simply Heavenly (1953), the final play involved in this study, is a folk comedy that is also a portrayal of urban Blacks. It takes place in Harlem. It is centered primarily around Jesse B. Simple's relationship with Joyce Lane. When Jesse Simple manages to get himself into tight situations because of his magnetic personality, Joyce stops speaking to him. Meanwhile he goes into several stages of depression that are mixed with humor, but which also motivate him to comment upon the disadvantages that he is encountering as a Black man in a white society. Finally,

the play ends on a happy note as Joyce and Simple are discussing their wedding plans.

The characters in this study will be examined to see whether they are static, dynamic and/or symbolic. In defining these terms one source has stated:

> 1. Flat or Stereotyped: These are characters who lack the full range of human qualities. Instead, they possess one or two qualities, often exaggerated, by which the writer makes them recognizable as character types.
> .....
> 2. Symbolic: A symbolic character is somewhat similar to the flat character discussed above in that he is sometimes not a fully developed human being. His most important function is to suggest an abstract idea (as any symbol).
> .....
> 3. Full or Realistic [Dynamic]: These are characters who have the full complement of ordinary human qualities....In other words, these characters are very much like those encountered in real life.[21]

The characters in this study will also be analyzed after Aristotle's method of character analysis. According to Aristotle, a character should be judged based on:

> 1. What he says and does
> 2. What he does not say or do
> 3. What the other characters and the author say about him.[22]

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[21]David Cox, and Stephen Lewis, The Student Critic: Thinking and Writing about Literature. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Winthrop Publishers, Inc., 1974), pp. 175-176.

[22]Aristotle, Poetics: Aristotle on the Art of Fiction, trans. by L. J. Potts, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1968), pp. 36-37.

Using the aforementioned techniques in this study, there will be a discussion of the characters' goals, motives, changes, values, philosophies of life, self-images, outcomes, attitudes, as well as their reactions to their circumstances (geographical, economic and social).

CHAPTER II

Patterns of Characterizations Among the Heroes

The main male characters in Five Plays are Robert Lewis, the rebellious mulatto son; and Colonel Thomas Norwood, a white traditionalist, who is Robert's father in Mulatto. In Little Ham the main character is Hamlet Jones, a sporty dressing comic who is delineated as a ladies' man. Randolph Bailey, who is referred to as Ronnie, is the revengeful son who returns from the dead to haunt his mother in Soul Gone Home. Big-Eyed Buddy Lomax, who is depicted as the "devil," appears in Tambourines to Glory. Finally, Jesse B. Simple, another comic, who undeliberately gets himself into troublesome situations, is the main male character in Simply Heavenly.

Robert Lewis, according to several sources, is "a major stereotyped figure."[23] He is the eighteen-year-old mulatto son of Colonel Norwood and his mistress-housekeeper Cora Lewis. He is a stubborn, rebellious, proud character who refuses to act the way a "nigger" is supposed to act. He is described in the character notes as:

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[23]Penelope Bullock, "The Mulatto in American Fiction," Phylon, VI (1945), p. 79. See also Arthur P. Davis, "The Tragic Mulatto Theme in Six Works of Langston Hughes," Phylon, XVI (Second Quarter, 1955), pp. 195-196.

> Cora's youngest boy: strong and well-built; a light mulatto with ivory-yellow skin and proud thin features like his father's; as tall as the Colonel, with the same gray-blue eyes, but with curly black hair instead of brown; of a fiery, impetuous temper--immature and willful--resenting his blood and the circumstances of his birth.[24]

Robert does not believe in saying "yes, sir," and "no, sir," to whites. He also refuses to enter back doors. He is an educated youth who is the contemporary of the militant Black youth who received attention in the sixties. He resents the fact that he has mixed blood and would rather live like a white boy rather than a "colored" boy. He fearlessly defies the accepted folk-ways of the Southern white plantation system.[25]

As a mulatto, he "is faced with the predicament of somehow resolving within himself the struggles between two cultures and two 'races.'"[26] The way that he deals with his dilemma makes him a very interesting character. He is driven by his desires for "freedom of body and mind" and "freedom of self-expression and recognition." His desire for these freedoms even surpasses his desire for "self-

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[24]Langston Hughes, "Characters," Five Plays edited by Webster Smalley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963), p. 2.

[25]Darwin Turner, "Langston Hughes as a Playwright," CLAJ, XI (June, 1968), p. 298.

[26]Penelope Bullock, "The Mulatto in American Fiction," Phylon, VI (1945), p. 78.

preservation" to the extent that he deliberately endangers his life.[27] Robert insists on disregarding the warnings that are given to him by his mother (Cora); his father (Colonel Norwood); and his oldest brother (William Lewis).

Robert's future as a rebellious youth probably began when he was about seven years old. According to his mother he:

> Went runnin' up to Colonel Tom out in de horse stable when de Colonel was showin' off his horses...to fine white company from town.... He went runnin' up and grabbed a-holt de Colonel and yelled right in front o' de white folks' faces, 'O papa, Cora say de dinner's ready, papa!' Ain't never called him papa before, and I don't know where he got it from. And Colonel Tom knocked him right back under the horse's feet. .....
> (I, p. 13)

William, Bert's brother, adds, "And when de company were gone, he beat that boy unmerciful." (I, p. 13) When Robert grew up he vowed, "I'm gonna act like my white half, not my black half." (I, p. 16) He also stated, "I might stay here for awhile and teach some o' these darkies to think like men...--but no more bowing down to white folks for me--not Robert Norwood," (instead of Lewis). (I, p. 16) He reiterates this point by declaring that no one is going to tell him what his place is because he is a white boy who has grey eyes. He

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[27]Napoleon Hill, The Science of Personal Achievement, Vol. 1 (Columbia, South Carolina: The Napoleon Hill Foundation, 1963), pp. 16-17.

further states that because he is white he has the natural rights to everything that anybody else has. (I, p. 16)

William actually thinks that Robert is foolish because he openly refers to Colonel Tom as their father. He says, "God knows what's got into Bert since he come back." He has been away for six years in school. "He's acting like a fool--just like he was a boss man round here. Won't say "yes, sir" and "no, sir" no more to de white folks." (I, p. 14)

Robert's desire to be respected as a Norwood (white man) and to be self-assertive is so intense that it exceeds the level of being a mere wish. It has become an obsession, especially when he tells Colonel Norwood, "I'm not your servant. You're not going to tell me what to do. You are not going to have Talbot run me off the place like a field hand you don't want to use anymore." (II, i, p. 24) He appears to be saying, I will not be denied. I will do whatever is necessary for me to do to be respected as an individual with rights that are equal to any white man including my father, Colonel Norwood.

While commenting on Robert, Darwin Turner states that "Since he was seven years old Robert has hated his father for refusing to recognize their relationship of which he himself

had been proud."[28] Mr. Turner further states that:

> Robert is obviously modeled on the proud and noble slaves of Negro literary tradition,.... His contempt for other Negroes, his stubborn insistence that he be recognized as a man, and his arrogant defiance of custom symptomize a fatal "hubris." In his deliberate provocation of trouble, a manifestation of what seems almost a suicidal complex, he anticipates James Baldwin's protagonist in Blues for Mister Charlie, written a generation later.[29]

Robert's "suicidal complex" or "tragic flaw" stems from his inherent unwillingness to remain passive in the face of what he conceives to be a challenge to his dignity, his image of his rightful status.[30]

Colonel Norwood feels that Bert is a "disobedient black buck" who "thinks he has a right to privileges, acting as if he owns the place since he's been back...this summer." (I, p. 4) When he antagonizes Colonel Norwood, Robert appears to experience a great deal of pleasure. He totally rebels against the fact that Colonel Norwood disowns him. This is the main source of his rebellion.

He detests his rural surroundings. He prefers to be in areas such as Atlanta, Richmond, or Washington "where... real colored people...don't have to take off their hats to

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[28]Darwin Turner, "Langston Hughes as a Playwright," CLAJ, XI (June, 1968), p. 297.

[29]Ibid., p. 298.

[30]Oscar Mandel, "A Definition of Tragedy," in The Play and the Reader, ed. Stanley Johnson, Judah Rierman, et al., (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966), p. 230.

white folks or let 'em go to bed with their sisters...." (I, p. 16)

Robert's second major conflict with Colonel Norwood occurs when Mr. Higgins, a white county politician, reports that Robert has sassed a white woman who is a postal clerk. According to Mr. Higgins, Robert ordered some radio tubes that were all smashed up. He did not realize this until after he had already paid for them. After he discovered their condition, he asked for his money back, and the postal clerk refused to return his money; and she asked a gang of whites to throw him out of the post office. However, he fled to his car and drove as rapidly as possible so that the mob would not catch up with him. Mr. Higgins also reports on Robert's fast driving. He tells the Colonel that Robert was driving so rapidly that he left a trail of dust behind him that was blinding.

The Colonel summons Robert. When Robert shows up, he enters the front door, and he wants to wait for the Colonel in his library. However, his mother, who is the only person who can really talk to him, persuades him not to wait in the library. When the Colonel comes, Robert, as usual, continues to demand respect as the Colonel's son. During this confrontation, Bert tells the Colonel that he is his son. The Colonel replies that he is Cora's boy and

that he is a bastard because "nigger women don't know the fathers. You are a bastard." (II, i, p. 23) This brings to mind Hughes' poem entitled "Mulatto." The following is an excerpt from this poem:

> I am your son, white man!
>
> Georgia dusk
> And the turpentine woods.
> One of the pillars of the temple fell.
>
> You are my son!
> Like Hell!
>
> .....
>
> Git on back there in the night,
> You ain't White!.....[31]

When Colonel Norwood tells Robert that he is not his son, Robert's anger and hatred heightens. He says, "I'd like to kill all the white men in the world." (II, i, p. 23)

At the conclusion of their confrontation, Robert attempts to go out of the door as he usually does. However, the Colonel blocks his path with his pistol in his hand. Robert challenges the Colonel to shoot him. Meanwhile, they begin to struggle. Robert chokes the Colonel to death. Triumphantly, Robert says (when his mother appears), "He's dead. My father's dead (laughing), I'm living." (II, i, p. 25) Following his mother's advice, he runs to keep a

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[31]Langston Hughes, "Mulatto," in Dark Symphony, eds. James A. Emmanuel and Theodore L. Gross (New York: The Free Press, 1968), pp. 204-205, reprinted from Selected Poems of Langston Hughes (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959).

white mob from catching him. However, he returns to his mother and goes upstairs to her bedroom. Then, he commits suicide with his last bullet. Robert remains proud and stubborn even when he knows that he is being chased by a white mob. Determined not to let the mob get him, he shoots himself.

According to the definition of the types of characters, Robert is definitely "static" or stereotyped because he does not change at all in this story. His goal is to be respected as a self-assertive and respected son of a white plantation owner from the beginning to the end of this play.

Colonel Thomas Norwood, the second main male character in Mulatto, is depicted as a "Plantation owner, a still vigorous man of about sixty, nervous, refined, quick-tempered, and commanding; a widower who is the father of four living mulatto children by his Negro housekeeper, Cora Lewis."[32] According to one source:

> Even Colonel Norwood is interesting as a character. Although Hughes, writing protest drama, stereotyped him from racial bigots of his own day and slave masters of the previous century, Norwood gains reality in his final confrontation with Bert.[33]

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[32]Langston Hughes, "Characters," Five Plays, ed. Webster Smalley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963), p. 2.

[33]Darwin Turner, "Langston Hughes as a Playwright," CLAJ, XI (June, 1968), p. 299.

Colonel Norwood's title suggests a military relationship. He is constantly ordering people to do things. He seems to have his household organized around a military set up. He is almost always moody; as a matter of fact, there are only two cases in this play in which he seems to be laughing or smiling. The first time he appears to be in a good mood is when he is talking to Sally, his mulatto daughter, just before she returns to school. (I, p. 6) He also appears to be somewhat in a good mood when he is talking to Mr. Higgins, the white county politician, about rheumatism, liquor and women. (I, pp. 8, 11)

Colonel Norwood's dilemma is that he wants to be thought of as a "respectable" white man who has control of his "darkies." (II, i, p. 21) However, he is not able to control Robert the way that he feels that he should. Therefore, he is always moody and upset with his house servants. He forbids his house servants to use the front door, and he becomes instantly furious as soon as he is informed that Robert quite frequently uses the front entrance. He has detested Robert ever since he called him "papa" in front of his white company. He often refers to Robert as "sassy," "impudent" and a "bastard."

In the first part of Mulatto Norwood informs Cora, "There's no nigger-child of mine, yours, ours--no darkie--going to disobey me." (I, p. 4) He threatens to send Robert

to the fields so that Talbot, his overseer, can tame him. He regrets the fact that he has allowed Robert to spend six years in school because he feels that this has only made matters worse. He reaches his highest point of anger with Robert, especially, when Mr. Higgins informs him that Robert has sassed a white woman and left a trail of dust in his path while he (Robert) was speeding. With a pistol in his hand he confronts Robert. Initially, he orders Robert to "talk right." (II, i, p. 24) He clarifies his order by saying, "I mean talk like a nigger should to a white man." (II, i, p. 24) He disowns Robert; and in a state of anger, he orders Robert to leave the plantation, to "Get the hell out of this county. (Suddenly furious) Don't let me lay eyes on you again. Get out of here now." (II, i, p. 24)

When Robert attempts to go out of the front door, Colonel Norwood, with his pistol in his hand, blocks the exit. Then Robert challenges him to shoot, but Colonel Norwood, who at this moment must realize that Robert is his son, his own flesh and blood, does not have the determination to kill him even when Robert begins to choke him to death.

Like Robert, Colonel Norwood is a static or stereotyped character who basically remains the same throughout

the play. His main obsession seems to be to make Robert yield to his authority the same way the other "darkies" do.

Hamlet Jones, referred to as "Ham" in Little Ham is depicted in a vein that is just the opposite of Robert and Colonel Norwood. Instead of being tragic and serious he is humorous and sometimes stupid. He is portrayed as "a sporty young shoe shiner."[34] Webster Smalley refers to him as a "pint-sized, wise-cracking, fast-talking ladies' man."[35] He is definitely a character who has a way with women. He also attempts to use big words which he frequently mispronounces. On one occasion when the subject of religion comes up, Ham says, "I was baptized and reverted when I was ten years old...." (I, p. 65) On another occasion when he takes a number from one of the characters, she asks him a question. He responds by saying, "You're perzactly correct." (II, p. 92)

One character, Shingle, says, "I wish I was as lucky as little old Ham. He sure do have plenty good womens and he's always hittin' the numbers. For such a little man, he musta done got a charm or somethin' 'nother." (I, p. 47)

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[34]Langston Hughes, "Characters," Five Plays, p. 44.

[35]Webster Smalley, "Introduction," Five Plays, p. xii.

Another character who is one of the members of a white gang of numbers' dealers refers to Ham as a "personality lad." (I, p. 75)

Ham likes to party and have fun. His primary motive for living is to love and have fun. He does not appear to have a serious vein in him. He is always late for work, but he always manages to escape being reprimanded. Madam Lucille Bell, the proprietress of Paradise Shining Parlors where Ham works, tells him, "I let you stay around if you is late all the time." (I, p. 51) Ham also deliberately manages to get himself into tight situations with women, but he always escapes without bodily harm. One day Madam Bell tells him:

> Ham, honey, sometimes I worry about you. Honest I do,.... You fool around with too many women. And you don't take none of them serious. Someday, someone of 'em's gonna get mad and cut you from here to yonder. (I, p. 52)

Ham, in a very humorous way, says, "Not me baby! Oh, no! When it comes to cuttin' and shootin', that's when I'm gone. Me and weapons don't mix." (I, p. 52)

Women are always buying things for Ham. When he is asked why he does not buy things for them, he responds, "I like to give women pleasure. They loves to present me with things." (I, p. 50) On the other hand, Ham frequently gets

tired of women and, when he does, he behaves in a manner similar to the typical Don Juan character. He begins to avoid them. On one occasion Laura, one of his former girl-friends, calls him at Paradise Shining Parlors, and he answers the phone by imitating a woman's voice, "I tell you Ham don't work here no more.... No, indeed!" (I, p. 55) When he likes a woman, he flatters her the way he does Tiny Lee, who is a fat hairdresser. He tells her that she is "a sweet little woman." (I, p. 57) On one occasion Tiny visits him at work, and when she leaves he says, "You know, I believe I loves her." Shingle says, "You always loves the last female you just meets. You don't know what love is no how." (I, p. 60) Then Ham defines love by saying, "Love is taking till you can't give no mo'." (I, p. 60)

Ham finally manages to get himself into what initially appears to be a tight spot. He promises to take two ladies, Mattie Bea and Tiny Lee, to the Hello Social Club for a charleston contest. He also promises to buy a special coat for both of these women. Nevertheless, one day he drops by Tiny Lee's beauty parlor while Mattie Bea is also there getting a hair-do for the contest. Meanwhile, Ham, who does not know that Mattie Bea is there, begins to discuss the contest with Tiny Lee, and he also begins to talk very intimately to her. Soon after this, Ham is the object of

a ladies' quarrel. He is jailed because the police think that he is fighting Mattie Bea. However, as usual, he talks his way out of jail.

After he is released from jail, he escorts Tiny Lee to the Club for the contest. He is almost involved in another fight, but Gilbert, Mattie Bea's husband, who also likes Tiny, shows up. When he and Mattie Bea see each other, they decide to be peaceful. Meanwhile, Ham and Tiny win the contest, and they mention their plans to be married.

Randolph Bailey, who is called "Ronnie," is presented in a somewhat humorous fashion, but he is certainly a tragic character who is mainly a voice in Soul Gone Home. He is depicted as a deceased sixteen year old Black youth who speaks to his mother from the "spirit world." He accuses her of neglecting him and rearing him without any "manners nor morals, neither." (p. 40) Evidently, he never had the audacity to speak to her this way before. However, he informs her that he has learned a great deal in the spirit world. He tells her that she has been "a hell of a (no-good) Mama!" (p. 39) He also tells her that she underfed him and that is the reason that he died of tuberculosis.

Ronnie, a static character, seems to be used as a voice to speak for all the Black youths who have been and are victims of their circumstances--youths who have been

reared in "tenement rooms" in the midst of poverty while there is wealth all around them. He appears to be striking out at white repressive American society by striking out at his mother. In one case, both he and his mother claim that it was not their fault that they have been without money to buy the proper nourishment. With this statement comes a reverberation of the implied questions: Whose fault is it? Are they accusing white society?

It is very ironic that Ronnie seems to be enjoying his death more so than he enjoyed his life. It is also ironic and somewhat humorous that Ronnie decides to comb his hair and put his stocking cap on so that the white ambulance attendants will not see him "with" (his) "hair standin' straight up in front,...." (p. 42) Nevertheless, this statement appears to serve as a catharsis to ease the emotions that have probably been aroused up to this point. After Ronnie "tidy's up," two white attendants come to pick up his body.

Ronnie, a static character, is basically a voice that is being used to symbolize the results of white repression on Black youths in America.

Big-Eyed Buddy Lomax, like the heroines in Tambourines to Glory, is delineated as a "symbolic" character who represents evil. He even refers to himself as "the devil" in

the prologue of the play. He says:

> You think I'm who you see, don't you?
> Well, I'm not. I'm the Devil....I've
> got plenty, plenty of names, had plenty--
> some pretty big ones--Hitler, for exam-
> ple....Mack-the-Knife, Gyp-the-Blood,
> Don Juan among the covers [sic] ....[36]
> .....

Of all the heroes in this study, Buddy is the only one who has been referred to as "unlovable." Another source refers to him as a "villain."[37]

In introducing himself, Buddy says, "I loves being the devil because I raises so much hell!"[38] He further states that in spite of the fact that he does not win when he struggles against the forces of goodness, he experiences a great deal of pleasure during the struggle.

Similar to the generally known depiction of the devil, Buddy appears from nowhere to rescue Laura from a policeman who is about to bribe her into giving him some money so that he will not inform the establishment that she is illegally running a storefront church. Like the general depiction of the devil, Buddy is also cunning and sly. He persuades Laura to believe that he is the "best thing that ever happened to her." He tells her that he is

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[36]Langston Hughes, "Prologue," Five Plays, ed. Webster Smalley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963), p. 188.

[37]Webster Smalley, "Introduction," Five Plays by Langston Hughes (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963), p. xvi.

[38]Hughes, "Prologue," Five Plays, p. 188.

going to show her how to make more than "peanut money" out of the "religious jive" that she is involved in. (I, iii, p. 202) He suggests that she should sell "tap water" for "holy water." Later in an aside he says, "She don't know she's with the devil. Ha! Ha!...." (I, iv, p. 205) He also suggests that she should begin to advertize the fact that she gives out numbers.

Buddy specializes in spreading confusion and jealousy. Even after he tells Laura that she is his number one woman, he continues to date Gloria, one of Laura's choir girls. He derives a great deal of pleasure from knowing that he makes Laura jealous. Like Ham, but with more evil intentions, he floats from woman to woman. He also likes Marietta, Essie's sixteen year old daughter. He tries to lure her away from C. J. who is her contemporary.

On one occasion when Marietta asks C. J. to tell her the meaning of his initials, Buddy tells her, "Certified jerk," Consecrated jackass...one of those holy sanctified boys.... Probably won't even take a chick to the movies on Sunday." (I, vi, p. 215)

As the play progresses Buddy joins the temple. Pretending to be happy he says:

> The devil had a playground
> In my heart one day.
> He set up his tents of sin
> And invited me to play.

> And invited me to play [sic]
> It was so nice, so calm and cool
> That I played just like the fool.
> I almost lost my mortal soul--
> Now I've got the devil told.
> .....
> (I, vii, p. 226)

Then he opens Act II by again saying that he is the devil, and he gives tips on how to lure people to the devil and how to be a good devil.

Throughout the play Essie has referred to Buddy as a "devil." C. J. finally tells Buddy that he is ruining the Temple by running after the girls and turning it "into a gamblin' den." (II, i, p. 233) He also tells him that he is not good for Harlem because he "tricks too many innocent people and he is related to the devil." (II, i, p. 233).

Finally, Buddy plays one trick too many when he shows up at the Temple with Gloria. This upsets Laura. He attempts to force her to kiss him after he has slapped her. She stabs him with a knife, and he dies.

Jesse B. Simple, the last hero to be discussed in this study, like Ham, is a comic character. He appears to be a more sophisticated descendant of the comic Black characters of early American literature. In the character notes he is referred to as:

> A Chaplinesque character, slight of build awkwardly graceful, given to flights of fancy, and positive statements of opinion--stemming from a not so positive soul. He is dark with a likeable smile, ordinarily

> dressed, except for a rather flamboyant summer sports shirt. Simple tries hard to succeed, but the chips seldom fall just right. Yet he bounces like a rubber ball, he may go down, but he always bounds back up.[39]

He is always behind in his rent; therefore, he has to walk the landlady's dog, which he detests doing.

Simple says that he is in love with Joyce, the heroine in Simply Heavenly, but he has not gotten a divorce from his first wife. He refuses to pay for this divorce because he says he does not love his first wife and he does not have any money anyway.

Simple definitely is not depicted as a moralist. He is always doing devilish things. On one occasion he is caught watching Joyce dress from between his legs. He was supposed to have turned his back. He seems to be easily tempted by women like Zarita, who is the happy-go-lucky type. During the third scene of Act I, Simple goes with Zarita and another couple on a ride. They have an accident. Simple ends up in the hospital in a cast. While he is in the hospital, Simple tells Melon, one of the minor characters, "...something is always liable to happen" to a man "--especially if he's colored. In this world, Melon, it's hard for a man to live until he dies." (I, iv, p. 132)

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[39]Langston Hughes, "Character Notes," Five Plays, p. 115.

After he is released from the hospital, he is informed that he has to pay one third of the price for a divorce from his first wife. He goes by Paddy's Bar, the place where most of the characters hang-out. In a state of depression that has resulted from all of his troubles, Simple says:

> I'm broke, busted and disgusted. And just spent near my last nickel for a paper--and there ain't no news in it about colored folks. Unless we commit murder, robbery or rape, or are being chased by a mob, do we get on the front page, or hardly on the back. (I, v, p. 139)

Prior to his hospitalization, Simple seems to have been taking advantage of Joyce's good nature. However, while he is in the hospital, he tells her that he seriously plans to change. Nevertheless, he gets caught with Zarita in his apartment. Zarita just shows up "out of the blue." He never invites her. Joyce becomes upset with him and begins to treat him coldly. He has already been laid off his job. Boyd, one of the characters in this story, goes to see Joyce and explains that Simple never invited Zarita. He also says, "Well, everybody just likes Simple. That's his trouble. He likes people, so they like him." (II, vii-viii, p. 171)

When Joyce begins to treat him coldly, he changes. He is heard crying late at night. After Joyce apologizes for treating him so coldly he tells her that he is going to be at his best when he visits her again. At the end of the

play Simple really changes; he is much more serious. He presents her with his divorce papers, a ring and a down payment on an apartment.

Of all the characters that are analyzed in this paper, Simple comes the nearest to being a full or dynamic (changing) rather than a static character. He also appears to be used as a spokesman for Black people, especially when he makes such serious statements as:

> I can see myself now, in World War III, leading white Mississippi troops into action.....(II, xi, p. 178)

He goes on to say that when the war ends, he will say:

> And when we all stagger back to peace together, let there be peace--between you, Mississippi, and me! (Ibid.)

He appears to make a plea for forgiveness and peace for the two races that have been separated by fear, hatred and misunderstanding. Therefore, like Randolph Bailey in Soul Gone Home, Simple is used to say or "utter positive statements from a not so positive soul."

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[40]Langston Hughes, "Character Notes," Five Plays, edited by Webster Smalley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963), p. 115.

CHAPTER III

Patterns of Characterization Among the Heroines

Similar to his depictions of his heroes, Hughes' depiction of his heroines includes a variety of characterizations. The heroines include Cora Lewis, the self-sacrificing Black mother in Mulatto; the horrified mother in Soul Gone Home; Joyce Lane, the moralist in Simply Heavenly; and Essie Belle Johnson, the saint, along with Laura Wright Reed, the sinner, in Tambourines to Glory.

Cora Lewis, the self-sacrificing Black mother, is described as "a brown woman in her forties who has kept the house and has been the mistress of Colonel Norwood for some forty years."[41] Her main concern is the welfare of her children. However, she also has a very deep affection for Colonel Norwood. In describing Cora, Darwin Turner states:

> Cora Lewis...seems a familiar figure from American stories about the antebellum days. At first, she is merely the docile servant, who, for many years has lived with the master, nutured him, and borne his children without concern for herself and without complaint.[42]

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[41]Langston Hughes, "Character Notes," Five Plays, edited by Webster Smalley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963), p. 2.

[42]Darwin Turner, "Langston Hughes as a Playwright," CLAJ, XI (June, 1968), p. 298.

Cora accepts her predicament as a way of life for herself. However, she goes out of her way, even to lie, so that her children can escape being in a similar situation. For example, she tells Colonel Tom that one of her daughters is working as a maid up North. However, she is employed as a teacher and is passing as a white person. Cora also creates a similar story for Sally. She constantly pleads Robert's case. In so doing she often appeals to Colonel Norwood's fatherly instinct. On one occasion when Colonel Norwood is very upset with Robert, Cora says:

> He don't mean nothing--just smart and young and kinder careless, Colonel Tom, like ma Mother said you used to be when you was eighteen. (I, p. 5)

Cora seems to be the only one who can really converse with Robert. At the point of tears, she tries to persuade him not to be so stubborn and rebellious. She says:

> Oh, Lawd, have mercy! (Beginning to cry) I don't know what to do. De way he's acting up can't go on. Way he's acting to de Colonel can't last. Somethin's gonna happen to ma chile. I had a bad dream last night, too, and I looked out and seed de moon all red with blood. I seed a path of blood across this house.... (I, p. 15)

Cora's personality takes an abrupt change after Robert murders Colonel Norwood. Several authors say that she goes insane. However, Hughes says, "At the time of the final

curtain...the mother goes mad."[43] Darwin states:

> After Norwood's death, however, Cora assumes more significant dimensions. Revealing that love caused her to excuse Norwood's faults and cling to him, she now repudiates him because his death threatens her son, who is even more precious to her.[44]

Cora, the once "docile servant," suddenly becomes embittered. In a state of madness she speaks out at Colonel Norwood's dead body and says:

> Colonel Tom, you hear me? Our boy, out there runnin? (Fiercely) You said he was ma boy--ma bastard boy. I heard you... but he's yours too...but yonder in de dark runnin'--runnin' from yo' people....Yes, he's mine. But don't call him that. Don't you touch him now....Don't you come to ma bed no mo'..... Damn you, Colonel Norwood! (Backing slowly up the stairs, staring at the rigid body below her) Damn you, Thomas Norwood! God damn you! (II, i, pp. 26-27)

Toward the end of Act II Cora seems to be used as a special messenger when she says, "White mens, and colored womens, and their little bastard chilluns--that's de old way of de South--but it's ending now." (II, ii, p. 30)

Despite the fact that Cora is basically a static or stereotyped character, she, like Simple, undergoes a much

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[43]Langston Hughes, I Wonder As I Wander, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1956), p. 311.

[44]Darwin Turner, "Langston Hughes as a Playwright," CLAJ, XI (June, 1968), p. 298.

greater change in depiction than the rest of Hughes' characters.

The Mother in Soul Gone Home is depicted as "a large, middle-aged Black woman" who is pretending that she is deeply grieved because of the death of her sixteen year old son. (p. 39) She is extremely horrified or shocked as he speaks to her because he is supposed to be dead. When he tells her that she has "been a hell of a mama," her pretended grief is brought to a screeching halt. (p. 39) She is taken aback in disbelief because she did not believe that her son would speak to her this way. She trembles violently when he continues to speak to her in such a harsh tone. She even attempts to slap his face, but she recoils when he rolls his big white eyes at her. In a state of anger, however, she retaliates by telling him that he (Ronnie) has never been "any use to her." (p. 40) She says that he was too weak and sickly and that he has only been a burden to her.

The Mother is further astonished by the words that Ronnie uses, such as "morals," "manners," and "undernourishment." (pp. 40-41)

She implies that she has done her very best to rear and feed Ronnie and that it was not her fault that she did not have enough money to feed him. She also seems to be

implying that she is a victim of her circumstances. However, very ironically, her entire tone changes when she discovers that the city's ambulance is coming to pick up Ronnie's body. She tells him: "Don't let the white men see you quarreling with your mother. Lay down and fold your hands back like you had 'em." (p. 41) Then she resumes her pretended mourning. However, as soon as the ambulance attendants leave "she begins to rouge and powder her face." (p. 42) The rest of the play implies that she is a prostitute and that she is going out to make enough money to buy some flowers for her son's funeral.

What is really amazing about this delineation is the Mother's ability to change her moods so abruptly. Despite the changes in her emotions, she is a static character who, like her son, Ronnie, is used as a symbol of the results of white repression.

Joyce Lane, in Simply Heavenly, unlike Cora in Mulatto and the Mother in Soul Gone Home, is a more easy-going character. She is depicted as "a quiet girl more inclined toward club work than bars, toward "culture" rather than good-timing...." ("Character Notes," p. 115)

As scene two of Act I opens, Joyce is singing "Love is Simply Heavenly." (I, ii, pp. 118-119) She tells Simple, who tries to close her door while he is visiting her, to

leave a crack in the door because she respects her landlady. Simple tells her that "morals is your middle name." (I, ii, p. 119) When Simple offers her a beer, she says, "Tomorrow's communion Sunday, I do not drink beer before communion." (I, ii, p. 119) She further exemplifies a moralistic attitude when Simple tries to make advances toward her. She warns him that what he is asking for is reserved for "marriage, not courtship." (I, ii, p. 120) She also warns him that he is going to have to get a divorce. Joyce further demonstrates her puritanical attitude by going to bed early, and she fusses at Simple for staying up so late.

Joyce is very sensitive. When she visits Simple in the hospital, she immediately begins to cry. She also stays upset with him about his affair with Zarita. For example, when she finds Zarita in his apartment, she leaves abruptly and becomes very cold towards him. However, she is deeply moved when she discovers that Simple never invited Zarita to his apartment, and she apologizes for treating him so coldly. Then she states that she is determined to marry Simple, and she is not going to let anyone get in her way.

Joyce, like the Mother in Soul Gone Home, is a static character whose basic function appears to serve as a contrast to Simple. Her characterization gives more meaning to the reasons for the changes in Simple's personality.

Laura Wright Reed, in Tambourines to Glory, is definitely different from the other heroines. She is a very interesting character. In the "Author's Notes" it is stated that:

> The role of Laura should be performed by a compelling personality, one not merely pretty, but capable of projecting sunlight, laughter, easy-going summer, and careless love." (p. 184)

Laura is depicted as a worldly character. It does not appear as if she possesses any piety at all. Her primary goal seems to be to make money, to have fun, and to make love.

When Essie is evicted from her apartment and she is patiently sitting on the curb, Laura tells her that she is too peaceful, but she should "be raising hell." (I, i, p. 191) She also suggests to Essie that they should start a church. However, she makes it very clear that her primary goal is to "make money Mammy!" (I, i, p. 192)

She further demonstrates her worldliness by planning to use a fear tactic to get the people to join the church. She plans to tell them that the world is coming to an end. She uses a traditional minister's approach to entice the people to join the church. She recalls her conversion by saying:

> It was one night last spring..., right on the street, I saw a flash, I heard a roll of thunder, I felt a breeze and I

> seen a light and a voice exploding out
> of heaven cried, 'Laura Wright Reed,'
> ....'Take up the cross and follow me!'
> (I, ii, p. 195)

She makes an appeal to people of all ages and all races to join her church. Then she immediately begins to take up a collection. Throughout this play Laura uses every available chance and reason to take up collections. She cuts the church services short just to accept a date with Buddy Lomax.

Laura is gullible and selfish at the same time. She accepts Buddy's suggestions to sell tap water for "holy water," to give out numbers in church and to buy a Cadillac. Not only is Laura selfish, but she is also very jealous of the attention Buddy gives to other women; and she is also jealous of anyone, especially Birdie Lee, who is able to sing and talk eloquently.

Laura falls overwhelmingly in love with Buddy to the extent that she still loves him even when he begins to mistreat her publicly and to degrade her. When Essie tries to persuade her to stop being so worldly and to try to get "spiritual love," Laura says, "The spirit can't do a woman like me no good in the bed." (I, vi, p. 214) She also tells Essie that she has a very difficult time trying not to yield to temptation, but that she (Essie) has always been good. Then she says that her philosophy of life is to "Eat, drink,

and love, that's what I live for!" (I, vi, p. 214)

Laura warns Buddy about running after women. When Buddy retaliates by reminding her that she would be lost without him because he has been giving her all of her money-making ideas, she becomes depressed. She knows that Buddy only means harm, but she finds that she loves him too much. During Laura's state of depression, she tells Essie that her mother would never tolerate a man like Buddy. According to her story, her mother was very active with men, but she could control them. Then Laura speaks to her deceased Mother. She says:

> I made it, Mama! Look at this place, Mama! Look at this fine silk sofa. Look at these chairs--French, Mama. Look at them drapes, the best money can buy. And what am I drinking? Ten dollar Scotch!..... Mama, you hear me, don't you? I'm gonna make a toast. A toast to your daughter, Laura. A toast--to Miss Bitch.
> (II, i, p. 237)

Laura finally gets fed up with Buddy when he shows up at the Temple with Gloria. One minute he fusses at her and slaps her, and the next minute he tries to make her kiss him. Laura stabs him with Essie's knife. After she murders him, she prepares to go on the stage of the Temple by ordering a loud resounding piece of music to prepare the congregation for her entrance. When she goes onto the stage, she begins to sell holy water. Meanwhile, Essie is jailed. However,

Laura finally confesses. She is charged with murder in self-defense, and she is temporarily released on bond. Laura visits the Temple and confesses her sins and asks the congregation to forgive her. This is her first occasion to be serious about the church.

Like Big-Eyed Buddy Lomax, Laura is symbolic of evil. However, Langston Hughes does not make her into a villain. Perhaps this stems from the experience that he had when he lived with his Auntie and Uncle Reed. According to Hughes his:

> Auntie Reed was a Christian and made me go to church and Sunday school every Sunday. But Uncle Reed was a sinner and never went to church, as long as he lived, nor cared anything about it. In fact, he washed his overalls every Sunday morning (a grievous sin) in a big iron pot in the back yard, and then just sat and smoked his pipe under the grape arbor in summer, in winter on a bench behind the kitchen range. Both of them were very good and kind--the one who went to church and the one who didn't. And no doubt from them I learned to like both Christians and sinners equally well.[45]

Essie Belle Johnson, the last, but not the least, of the heroines and characters to be analyzed in this study, plays the

> Role of the good earth, solid always there come sun or rain, laughter or tears, the eternal mother image.[46]

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[45]Langston Hughes, The Big Sea, p. 18.

[46]Langston Hughes, "Character Notes," Five Plays, edited by Webster Smalley (Bloomington: Indiana Press, 1963), p. 184.

In her first appearance in the play, she has just been evicted from "her tenement room" (I, ii, p. 196) However, she is not fussing and cussing. She is just peacefully waiting.

She is delineated as a symbol of goodness, a very religious person. She scolds a youth for using profanity while he expresses sympathy for her because she has been evicted. She tells a woman bypasser, "God'll provide for me." (I, i, p. 190) Later on in this same scene, Laura tells Essie that she is too peaceful, but Essie merely states that she waits and depends on God.

Essie does not instantly accept Laura's suggestions to start a church to make money. Rather, she questions these possibilities. Initially, she rejects the ideas. She tells Laura that she plans to save her, too. She becomes upset when anyone talks about using religion to exploit the poor.

It is clearly indicated that Essie does not like Buddy because she tells Laura that he should be the devil in the Garden of Eden scene in the Temple. She feels that Buddy just plans to ruin the Temple. She constantly tries to persuade Laura to get rid of Buddy. She is not as gullible as Laura is. But ordinarily she does not have a mean bone in her.

Essie is very altruistic. On one occasion when Laura tells her that she needs to buy some new clothes, Essie states that their money needs to be used to upgrade Harlem, "Make a playground,...set up a day care nursery." (I, v, pp. 207-209)

As a mother, Essie is a very loving person. She loves Marietta, her daughter who has been living in the South. She is very appreciative when Laura allows her to use some of their money to send for Marietta.

Essie is jailed because her knife was used to murder Buddy and one of the members of the Temple stated that Essie killed Buddy because she hated him very intensely. When she is taken to the jail, she takes her Bible with her and continues to be spiritually led in spite of her misfortune. When she discovers that Laura, who murdered Buddy, has been arrested and released, she says, "God works in mysterious ways his wonders to perform." (II, vi, p. 254) Following Laura's confession to the congregation, Essie asks the church to forgive her.

Due to the fact that Essie is depicted in such a Christ-like manner with super human attitudes and reactions, one can easily conclude that she is symbolic.

CHAPTER IV

Conclusion

Recurrences of Patterns of Characterizations

After examining the depiction of the heroes and heroines that are presented in this study, one can easily conclude that there are several similar and/or recurring patterns of characterizations. These patterns include the sons, the comics, the mothers, the moralists and the sinners.

The Sons, Robert Lewis of Mulatto and Randolph Bailey of Soul Gone Home, are both depicted with rebellious natures. They also are embittered because of the circumstances of their birth and life. Their natures are very perplexing to their mothers. However, Ronnie Bailey dies because he has contacted tuberculosis as a result of improper nourishment. Robert, however, commits suicide to keep a white mob from killing him.

The Comics, Jesse B. Simple in Simply Heavenly and Hamlet Jones in Little Ham, are both portrayed as comics who are well-liked by the other characters in these plays. They usually manage to get themselves into tight situations

with their fellow women characters. However, it appears as if Ham deliberately puts himself into these situations. When Simple gets into a tight situation, he does manage to bounce back in the end. Meanwhile, he suffers from depressions and frustrations and in one case he is hospitalized. Ham always manages to talk himself out of tight situations without suffering any bodily injury. Simple is more serious than Ham. Ham does not really seem to let anything or anyone get him down. Both Ham and Simple have a tendency to mispronounce words and to use non-standard grammar. Both of them are finally depicted in a happy ending.

The Mothers, Cora in Mulatto and the Mother in Soul Gone Home, really do not appear to have very much in common other than the fact that they are both perplexed by their sons. Otherwise, they are quite different. Cora is very serious and self-sacrificing. The Mother, on the other hand, is pretentious and appears to be loose.

Nevertheless, the role that Essie plays as a mother is quite similar to Cora's role. Both Cora and Essie love their children, and they go out of their way to make sure that their children are secure. Both of them seem to undergo frustrations without complaint. Cora, however, changes at the end of Mulatto.

The Moralists, both Joyce Lane in Simply Heavenly and Essie Belle Johnson in Tambourines to Glory, are somewhat similar. Both of them are religious, and they do not believe in doing things that degrade their standards. They are also somewhat critical of their fellow characters who do not seem to have moral values similar to theirs. Of the two, however, Essie is more mature and more religious than Joyce.

The Sinners: Like his depiction in Tambourines to Glory, Big-Eyed Buddy Lomax stands alone. However, he and Laura have some common qualities. They are both very worldly and extremely selfish. They are also vain in terms of their feelings about themselves. They like to be the center of attraction and they get jealous whenever someone else secures this spot.

Several of Hughes' critics have stated that the majority of the characters that have been evaluated in this study are stereotyped. In spite of the fact that they are stereotyped, there are numerous differences between them and their predecessors of the early American literature. They are much more realistic than the Black characters who played such narrow roles as merely being the comic relief for plays, etc. Langston Hughes' characterizations paved the way for

our modern day Black playwrights who now have more opportunities to create realistic characterizations. Webster Smalley states that:

> Hughes creates his characters from life. He does not create a character to fit a preconception, so he is not frightened if some of his creations do things and like things that Negroes are reputed to do and like.[47]

Hughes seems to be answering his critics who have referred to his characters as being stereotypes by speaking through one of his characters in Simply Heavenly. When Melon, one of the characters in this play, refers to the other characters as stereotypes, Mamie, one of the other characters says:

> Why, it's getting so colored folks can't do nothing no more without some other Negro calling you a stereotype. Stereotype, hah! If you like a little gin, you're a stereotype. You got to drink Scotch. If you wear a red dress, you're a stereotype. You got to wear beige or chartreuse. Lord have mercy, honey, do-don't like no black eyed peas and rice! Then you're a down-home Negro for true--which I is--and proud of it!..... I didn't come here to Harlem to get away from my people. I come here because there's more of 'em. I loves my race. I loves my people. Stereotype! (I, iii, pp. 125-126)[48]

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[47]Webster Smalley, "Introduction," Five Plays, p. xiii.

[48]See also Darwin Turner, "Langston Hughes as a Playwright," CLAJ, XI (June, 1968), p. 306.

When one looks at the characters in this study, he may ask, Why did Hughes not develop characters from the middle class? Hughes has already replied by saying that he was always amused with the "conventional-minded Blacks who made proud boast of being directly descended from the leading Southern white families,...."[49] Hughes further states:

> From all this pretentiousness Seventh Street was sweet relief. Seventh Street is the long, old dirty street, where the ordinary Negroes hang out, folks with practically no family tree at all, folks who draw no color line between mulattoes and deep dark-browns, folks who work hard for a living with their hands. On Seventh Street in 1924 they played the blues, ate watermelon, barbecue, and fish sandwiches, shot pool, told tall tales, looked at the dome of the capital and laughed out loud.[50]

In another part of the same source Hughes stated that he wrote about the people that he knew, and that he really never got to know the "upper class Negroes." He states that:

> I only knew the people I had grown up with, and they weren't people whose shoes were always shined, who had been to Harvard, or who had heard Bach. But they seemed to me good people, too.[51]

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[49]Langston Hughes, The Big Sea, p. 208.

[50]Ibid., pp. 208-209.

[51]Ibid., p. 268.

Upon looking at the characterizations in this study, one can conclude that Hughes definitely attempted to depict the Blacks that he knew in an honest manner. One can also conclude that Hughes should be applauded for his efforts, not only as a poet and a story writer but also for his efforts as a playwright. In his efforts to create a Black national theatre, Hughes should be respected as a pioneer. He paved the way for developing Black playwrights who have more opportunities to develop.

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